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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: "INDEPENDENT" MP CLAIMS TO PROMOTE GRADUAL CHANGE  
FROM WITHIN

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Chief Nathan Lane for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On August 23, "independent" Belarusian MP Abramova met unofficially with Pol/Econ Chief to encourage the USG to bolster support for independent media. According to Abramova, only economic reform and greater press freedoms, not radical change, are palatable to the Belarusian people and the Lukashenko regime. Abramova criticized the West's "confrontational" policies in Belarus and denounced the current opposition as hopeless. Abramova claimed she is an independent opposition activist using her position within the government to bring about change in Belarus, but failed to produce an example of how she has effectively promoted democracy as an MP. End Summary.

Abramova: Working Within to Promote Democracy  
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12. (C) On August 23, National Assembly representative Olga Abramova called on Pol/Econ Chief to discuss independent press in Belarus. Despite being a GOB official, Abramova repeatedly asserted to Pol/Econ Chief that she is an "independent" member of the opposition. She conceded the traditional opposition does not consider her a true opposition activist because of her position in the government, but she insisted that the only way to bring political and economic reform in Belarus was to foment change from within. Abramova maintained she uses her position within the government to promote democracy and influence GOB officials, stating, "I do more to promote democracy working within the government than the opposition does outside the government." However, when pressed by Pol/Econ Chief, Abramova could not produce a concrete example of how she uses her position to promote democracy.

13. (C) Nevertheless, Abramova claimed there were approximately five to fifteen MPs who support her pro-democratic initiatives and encouraged Pol/Econ Chief to use her as an intermediary to develop more contacts with these like-minded MPs.

Only Economic Change and Free Press Possible in Belarus  
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14. (C) Claiming to have a firm grasp of the Belarusian mentality due to her prior work as a sociologist, Abramova asserted that radical change in Belarus was not possible because today's opposition activists and their "radical"

tactics do not appeal to Belarusians. According to Abramova, economic reform is less controversial and more palatable to the Belarusian people and the Lukashenko regime.

15. (C) Abramova stressed independent media was the only true opposition force in Belarus and encouraged the USG to bolster support for independent press, particularly for Narodnya Volya. Abramova told Pol/Econ Chief she publicly expressed concern about the GOB crackdown on independent press and the limited distribution of print media within Belarus. However, her written complaints to the Ministry of Information and the Minsk City Executive Committee in defense of independent press were met with no response.

Abramova Criticizes West and Opposition, but Not Lukashenko  
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16. (C) According to Abramova, Lukashenko was incapable of reversing his anti-democratic policies and only his removal from power will bring about political reform. She added, however, that the West played a role in creating the current political climate by adopting confrontational policies that put Lukashenko on the defensive. Pol/Econ Chief corrected Abramova, explaining to her that USG efforts to work with the Lukashenko regime were only met with further repressions.

17. (C) Abramova called the opposition and their movements "hopeless," asserting that they were controlling the West. According to Abramova, the opposition would not actively work for change in Belarus for fear of losing the benefits of international attention, funding and travel opportunities that they currently enjoy.

18. (C) Although she claims to criticize the GOB on issues such as freedom of the press and the expulsion of politically

active students, Abramova stressed to Pol/Econ Chief that she would never publicly slander President Lukashenko because "it would not be wise." Instead, she criticizes his regime in more subtle and clever manner. However, she defended Lukashenko's reputation asserting that he was not personally involved in the 1999-2000 disappearances. When asked, Abramova stated that she and Lukashenko were acquaintances but she no longer has direct contact with him.

Comment  
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19. (C) Abramova is a self-proclaimed opposition activist, democracy promoter, expert election consultant, social worker, sociologist, and "effective" Member of Parliament. Perhaps shortly after the end of the Soviet Union she might have been connected with the opposition and civil society, but now Abramova appears quite comfortable as a GOB-employed MP who highlights her "opposition past" when it suits her needs. Her claims of working within the government to promote democracy are undermined by lack of results due to her inability to meet with GOB officials within the Presidential Administration, to bring legislation to attention, and to speak on the floor of the National Assembly without interference. It seems that Abramova's only method to promote democracy is using her occasional vote against anti-democratic legislation put before the parliament for its rubber stamp.

Moore